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Executive Registry

66-1448

29 March 1966

PACOM Review Completed

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Visit to CINCPAC Headquarters, 17 March

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I. The Director, upon hearing of [] telegram (see Annex I), directed me to visit CINCPAC personally and field these questions orally with the Commander and his staff.

II. On Thursday, 17 March, I had three appointments as follows:

A. From 9:00 a.m. to about 9:55 I appeared in the big CINCPAC briefing room before an audience of perhaps 30, composed of the Chief of Staff, CINCPAC, General Emrick; the J-2; the J-3; and about three or four other general or flag officers. Also present were about 25 officers from the intelligence staffs of CINCPAC, ARPAC, PACAF, and perhaps other subordinate commands.

1. At the 9:00 o'clock session I followed [] advice and began by reading the list of questions which had been conveyed in his message. I then spoke for about 40 minutes on the NIE and the method of its production, giving particular emphasis to those aspects which had been ticked off in the [] telegram. I got only two questions from the floor. They came from the chiefs at the horseshoe table in front and were in the nature of requests to elaborate some of my earlier remarks. No questions came from the indians in the rear.

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2. A short conversation with General Brown (the J-2) and General Hutchinson (the J-3) as I was leaving the room indicated that both officers knew of the bomb damage assessment study [redacted] prepared for the Secretary of Defense. From the way they talked I would guess that they had not seen a copy.

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B. From about 10:05 until 11:10 I was with the Commander, his Chief of Staff, and [redacted]

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1. In ^{this} [redacted] meeting with Admiral Sharpe I began by asking if he wished me to give him the full-dress briefing. When he was informed that General Emrick had just received this, he indicated that it would not be necessary. I then told him about the Board of National Estimates and its membership, and unfolded the big chart. He showed considerable interest in the document and I left a copy with him and another with General Emrick.

2. From there on the conversation was pretty much a back and forth on the estimating process with special reference to the many contingency estimates we had done on Vietnam (the SNIE 10 series). Without directly saying so, Admiral Sharpe clearly indicated a disagreement with many of the findings of the estimates, and almost as clearly he indicated, again indirectly, that he had no desire to argue individual findings. For example, the well-known

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12 tons per day figure came up. He said he did not believe it. I told him that the experts would not die for 12 tons, but they would die for anything much above 40 or 50.

3. He countered, not with another numerical estimate, but with pointed reference to the weight in pounds of the ammo for the heavier weapons which the Communists were using, and the large quantities of this ammo which were expended in engagements with our forces. He also spoke of the large caches of enemy supplies that our forces had overrun. He noted particularly the hundreds of tons of rice which had been captured. When I indicated that we believed this had been collected locally rather than shipped in from the North, he said yes, that was right. With this exchange we left the tonnage question.

4. Admiral Sharpe undertook to wig me gently about surface cargo going into North Vietnamese ports. First, how sure were we that no military supplies were going in? Weren't POL trucks, etc. military supplies? Of course I agreed with him that they were, but indicated that as far as the estimates were concerned, the only military supplies which we judged were not going into the ports were heavy weapons, for example, SAM equipment, aircraft, armored vehicles, etc. I went on to indicate that we estimated as we did, first because we had no positive evidence to the contrary, and second, we thought the Soviets would be very considerably inhibited at the thought of provoking the US into going again for

the kind of quarantine measures we took in Cuba in 1962. I think it was at this point that I told him that one only estimated when one ran out of facts or convincing direct evidence. He nodded.

5. It was clear that the national policy of leaving Haiphong-bound ships unmolested on the high seas was a most painful matter to him. He cited the case of a pilot identifying a freighter at sea with a deck cargo of trucks which he could have destroyed in two minutes, but which he had to permit to land and unload so that he could peck away at individual trucks when he found them running along flak-protected roads.

6. At one point, Admiral Sharpe asked me how we could estimate as we did if we knew about US projected strengths in the area. I replied with a statement of my own personal philosophy in this matter, namely that at the moment one made the crucial estimate he made it on the basis of the fact and argument which had gone before. I tried to underline that at this crucial moment the estimator's thinking had now gotten far beyond the last objective, factual guidepost. He was at the moment of pure judgment, a moment when his faculties stood vulnerable to a host of purely subjective forces. If one of these forces was the wish and if it was strong enough, it might overpower more rational dispassionate forces and triumph. It is too bad to make important estimates on the basis of a wish.

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7. I made the point that in my thinking there were perils both on the side of knowing too little and on that of knowing too much; that a final estimate made in full knowledge of US forces already in the field and the program for the planned augmentation of US forces would be as likely to skew the estimate out of line in one direction as total ignorance would skew it in the other. I went one step further, saying that personally and as an old intelligence type, I was more fearful of estimates which were composed in an atmosphere of full knowledge of own forces -- deployed and prospective -- than I was of those composed in other atmospheres. A headquarters atmosphere, which is not only permeated by this kind of knowledge, but also by a concomitant emotional dedication to success, is a hard place to make a dispassionate judgment. (I did not use the word "headquarters.")

C. From 2:00 until 3:00 p.m. I was with the J-2, Brig. Gen. Grover Brown, his number two, Captain McElwain, and

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1. With General Brown, the J-2, the points which troubled the Commander became much more explicit. Our discussion, which lasted exactly an hour, proceeded with complete amiability. However, one would have no difficulty in reconstructing what must have been Brown's thoroughgoing annoyance at some of the key

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judgments of our recent reaction papers. Brown's point of departure was what he felt to be the "undue gloom" (these, my notes tell me, were his words) of the key judgments in the Vietnam SNIE series. In the course of the conversation it was clear that he disagreed with the tone and probably the substance of the estimates which we had made in the following areas:

(a) the degree of difficulty which Communist forces were having in the zone of combat;

(b) the degree of difficulty which the DRV was experiencing in transporting adequate amounts of military supplies from North Vietnam to the combat zone;

(c) the degree of DRV resolve to continue the struggle in the teeth of the US air attack on North Vietnam; and

(d) the degree of willingness on the part of the Communist Chinese to escalate the conflict with the US.

2. The above points came out implicitly in a discussion which took off from his reference to paragraph 14 of SNIE 10-9-65 (see Annex II).

3. This was the paragraph in which the DCI and the Director, DIA, estimated that the "chances were about even that Chinese aircraft would deliberately engage the US over North Vietnam from bases within China" if US airstrikes "were extended to the Hanoi-Haiphong area and particularly to lines of communication to

south China." It will be recalled that the intelligence chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force dissented, putting the odds against Chinese intervention higher and that Tom Hughes dissented because he thought the odds were lower. General Brown was clearly on the side of the service dissenters, indeed I had the feeling he would have put the odds against Chinese intervention even higher than did they. He went on to indicate in the straightest talk I got all day that he believed that this paragraph of the SNIE was in large measure responsible for the subsequent attitude of the policy-maker; that the latter, upon reading that the chances of Chinese intervention were about 50-50, straightway ordained that the northeast corner of North Vietnam and the strip of North Vietnam lying along the China border would continue in sanctuary status. This decision was obviously a painful one to General Brown and his associates.

4. In pretty much this same context, but without reference to a specific paragraph of a specific estimate, he indicated a similar disappointment with respect to other judgments to the effect that the use of US air power so far had neither dented the DRV will to persist nor the DRV capability to deliver overland the quantities of military supplies which Communist forces in the battle area had to have in order to keep fighting. He did not indicate, however, any explicit desire to get down to the factual details upon which these ultimate conjectures rested.

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III. Conclusions: What follows are my own personal sentiments regarding my brief visit to the CINCPAC Headquarters. They are purely and simply a reading of text which lies between the lines and a personal reconstruction of what probably lay behind the [] telegram and the general tone if not the content of the remarks of the Commander and his J-2.

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A. First and foremost, the attitudes which I fancy I perceived were the normal attitudes of high-powered military men in the service of the world's most powerful military establishment finding themselves fighting a war which higher authority obliged them to fight with both hands tied behind their backs. Be it said that I wholly understand their attitude and truly marvel at their almost Jovian ability to rise above the classical frustrations of fighting a limited war.

B. To them the National Intelligence Estimate must inevitably appear as part and parcel of the Washington thinking which jells into the distasteful policy they must implement.

C. In the paragraphs above I have noted General Brown's position of dissent respecting four critically important areas of our estimating. I would give a hundred to one that these same dissenting views are held by almost everybody in uniform on the island of Oahu. The fact of the matter is that with a clear picture as to how the US effort in the Vietnam area has gone through a quantum

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jump in the last 12 months and is scheduled for another such jump in the next nine leads them to a much more optimistic estimate with respect to the situation than they find in the SNIEs. For example, it is my guess

that they think Communist main force elements in the battle area are having a thin time of it and that the time will get progressively thinner;

that the interdiction effort in MR IV and in Laos is imposing an all but insuperable burden upon DRV logistics and that the DRV is just not going to be able to transport the required freight (note in this context Admiral Sharpe's remarks about the enormously increased weight of the heavier weapons and their ammo going south);

that the DRV is rapidly becoming such a noisy place no one in his right mind, including dedicated Communists, can put up with the punishment (Brown pointed out that at this time last year the US was capable of mounting no more than 500 sorties per month, whereas today we are capable of mounting 5,000);

that the Chinese know very well on which side of the bread the butter lies, that they are not all insane, and that the odds are very high indeed that they would not escalate the war to the point where they had to cope with overwhelming US air and naval power in the Far East. (I personally have great sympathy for this point of view but would not perhaps put the odds as high as they seem to be putting them.)

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D. Lastly, I fancy that within the CINCPAC Headquarters there was a good deal of curiosity as to how one might account for the SNIEs concluding other than above. For example, what precisely is the meaning of the language on the outside and inside of the blue cover of any National Intelligence Estimate? Does it mean literally what it says and what it seems to imply: has the Director of Central Intelligence read the document before he "submits" it? do the members of USIB know what they are putting their names to when they "concur" with the Director? does "participation" as it occurs in the line "The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate..." really mean that the experts all over the intelligence community have come together, pooled their knowledge, and arrived at a general acceptance of the fact and judgment of the document? Although there were fairly senior officers within the J-2 section of CINCPAC, and the G-2s of the subordinate commands who knew all about the NIE process from prior personal experience, I got the feeling that the top command did not have the word and wanted it from an authentic source. It is possible, of course, that within this echelon some tall tales about NIE production were being circulated.



SHERMAN KENT
Director
National Estimates

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ANNEX I

Copy of List of Questions in Telegram

1. CINCPAC desires to further his knowledge regarding current policies and procedures of ONE.

A. Present organizational relationship to/within DD/I and in overall CIA scheme, and relationship to USIB?

B. What is composition of ONE Board, how many members, how selected, what are formal criteria, and by whom selected/appointed?

C. Is there a requirement for military members, if so present number, historically how many members have been military retirees, what are their names and service, length of individual tours?

D. Reserved military (on active duty) assigned to ONE staff positions: please provide general assessment if this is normal practice?

E. What is present procedure for USIB approval of estimates?

F. Discuss level at which initiation of an estimate begins, and describe process of initiation?

G. How are dissents both military and civilian handled, what is role DIA in dissent process?

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H. Brief resume of procedures from initial submissions to final estimate including effect of unified commands inputs?

I. What are the mechanics used to bring estimates to attention highest levels, and what is estimated impact (no specific case story required, a general assessment)?

2. Since this request will constitute a formal briefing for CINCPAC request reply by urgent dispatch.

3. Request ONE/DDI/CIA provide any and all documentation including history that is available and releaseable this subject to in order that we may be in position to service similar future requests from the PACOM commands.

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ANNEX II

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SNIE 10-9-65 (TS 185875, 23 July 1965)

Paras. 14 and 15, plus footnotes

14. If air strikes were extended to the Hanoi-Haiphong area and particularly to lines of communication from South China, the chances of Chinese Communist air intervention from Chinese bases would increase. This would particularly be true if the air strikes were effective in cutting the main roads and rail lines over which the principal supplies are moving. While we believe the Chinese would be reluctant to engage the US in an air war or to risk US retaliation against Chinese military installations, we consider the chances are about even that Chinese aircraft would deliberately engage the US over North Vietnam from bases within China. We do not believe, however, that this would lead to greatly increased Chinese Communist participation in the conflict. In any case, if large numbers of US aircraft were operating close to the frontiers of China the likelihood of hostile encounters would be high.*

15. If, in the circumstances described in paragraph 9, the Viet Cong and the DRV at some point wished to move toward negotiations, an important divergence might open up between Hanoi and

*Footnotes of dissent from this paragraph appear on the next page.

Peiping. The Chinese are themselves not suffering direct military damage and they fear that negotiations would give the USSR a chance to increase its role in Vietnam. Thus they would exert strong pressures to dissuade the DRV from entering into negotiations.

* The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence); Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; and the Director of NSA do not agree with the judgment expressed in this paragraph. They believe that it should read as follows: "If air strikes were extended to the Hanoi-Haiphong area and particularly to lines of communication from South China, the chances of Chinese Communist air intervention from Chinese bases would increase. Nevertheless, we believe the Chinese would be reluctant to engage the US in an air war or to risk US retaliation against Chinese military installations. We therefore consider it unlikely that Chinese aircraft would deliberately engage the US over North Vietnam from bases within China."

The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, believes that the chances are better than even that Chinese aircraft would deliberately engage the US under these circumstances. Even if air engagements were accidental they would have extremely dangerous repercussions and if they were deliberate they could not fail to lead to a wider war.

DATE: 30 Mar 66

FROM SHERMAN KENT

TO: Mr Helms. *put*

*of possible interest to
you & The Director.*